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Trade and Development Board
Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy
Second session
Geneva, 18–20 April 2018
Item 2 of the provisional agenda
Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

Provisional agenda and annotations

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II. Annotations

Item 1
Election of officers

1. The Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy will elect a Chair and a Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur.

Item 2
Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

2. The Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy may wish to adopt the provisional agenda reproduced in chapter I above.

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3. It is proposed that the opening plenary meeting of the second session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts, which will start at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 18 April 2018, should be devoted to procedural matters (agenda items 1 and 2) and introductory statements. The closing plenary meeting, on Friday, 20 April 2018, will be devoted to the provisional agenda of the third session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts, to be held tentatively in April 2019, and to the adoption of the report (agenda items 5 and 6). In view of the short duration of the session, the Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur will be authorized to complete the final report after the conclusion of the session.

4. The remaining meetings, from 18 April 2018 (after the election of officers and general statements) to the morning of 20 April 2018, can be devoted to the substantive issues of agenda items 3 and 4. If necessary, adoption of the report may be postponed until the late afternoon of 20 April 2018, to allow for an informal working session to be held that afternoon.

Documentation

TD/B/EDE/2/1	Provisional agenda and annotations

Item 3
Fostering development gains from domestic and cross-border e-commerce in developing countries

5. At the first session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy held on 4–6 October 2017, member States agreed that the policy focus of the second session would be fostering development gains from domestic and cross-border electronic commerce (e-commerce) in developing countries.[1]

6. New digital solutions, including for e-commerce, are creating new opportunities for companies of all sizes to engage in domestic and international trade, notably by increasing market access for customers, supply chains and competitors, and by reducing trade costs. This is affecting microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises in countries at all levels of development, but in different ways. Potential benefits for developing country companies and consumers range from greater efficiencies to deeper specialization and division of labour, gains from variety of choice and greater predictability for all players, as well as lower costs and prices of inputs and final products. Digital technologies can also be used to empower women entrepreneurs.

7. At the same time, such gains are not automatic, and digitalization also raises new challenges. In order to harness it in support of trade and sustainable development, investments in information and communications technology infrastructure need to be complemented by an appropriate set of regulations and institutions and the development of adequate skills. Current gaps in e-commerce readiness, between and within countries, imply that benefits from e-commerce are not equally distributed.

8. The Intergovernmental Group of Experts also agreed to discuss the following questions at the second session:

(a) How can developing countries foster local platforms for domestic and cross-border e-commerce?

(b) What are the existing barriers related to international e-commerce platforms that developing countries, including the least developed countries, face and how can these barriers be overcome?

(c) What are some of the operational constraints that small and medium-sized businesses in developing countries face when setting up trade online, and how can they be overcome?

(d) What are the good practices that developed and developing countries, including the least developed countries, can learn from each other?

[1] See TD/B/EDE/1/3, chapter I, paragraph 15.

9. To facilitate discussion, the UNCTAD secretariat has prepared a background note (TD/B/EDE/2/2) on this topic that reviews recent developments related to e-commerce, highlighting the growing role of digital platforms and potential implications for policy; examines barriers to accessing international e-commerce platforms; addresses operational constraints that may affect the ability of microenterprises and small businesses to trade online; and reflects on the four questions above.

10. Based on the outcomes of the discussions under agenda item 3, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts is expected to identify a set of agreed policy recommendations related to the overall topic and the associated questions.

11. Written contributions focusing on good practices regarding digital platforms are especially welcome to inform the discussion on question (d) in paragraph 8 above, and may be submitted online as described at the end of the present document.

Documentation

TD/B/EDE/2/2	Fostering development gains from e-commerce and digital platforms

Item 4
Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy

12. The policy recommendations of the first session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy (TD/B/EDE/1/3) included the following recommendation for consideration at the second session:

> [The Intergovernmental Group of Experts]... recommends the establishment of a Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy in a format that aligns with available resources; and invites the secretariat to prepare a concept note on the working group and explore interest among development partners to financially support its operations (chapter I, paragraph 12).

13. At the first session, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts also agreed to incorporate the present agenda item regarding the Working Group into the provisional agenda for its second session.[2]

14. In response, the UNCTAD secretariat has prepared a concept note concerning the possible establishment of the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy, explaining the needs the Working Group would address and outlining its role, potential outputs and activities, and practical arrangements and associated resource requirements.

15. The Intergovernmental Group of Experts is invited to discuss this topic and the suggested concept note. If sufficient extrabudgetary funding has been secured and the Trade and Development Board agrees in due course to the establishment of the Working Group, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts should also agree on the focus of the first meeting of the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy.

Documentation

TD/B/EDE/2/3	Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy

[2] TD/B/EDE/1/2, annex I.

Item 5
Provisional agenda for the third session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy

16. Acting in its capacity as the preparatory body for the third session, the Intergovernmental Group of Experts is expected to agree on the provisional agenda for its next session, which should come out of the discussions under agenda items 3 and 4.

Item 6
Adoption of the report of the second session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy

17. The Intergovernmental Group of Experts will adopt its report to the Trade and Development Commission.

In order to facilitate deliberations and the informal exchange of experiences and best practices on the topics to be discussed, member States and observers are requested to submit written contributions to the UNCTAD secretariat by Friday, 2 March 2018, via the following link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/R22QX3C.

Written contributions that share good practices regarding digital platforms are especially welcome, to inform the discussion related to question (d), quoted in paragraph 8 above and decided at the first session:

> What are the good practices that developed and developing countries, including the least developed countries, can learn from each other?